
Why this festival/What does it mean to develop new work?

This festival was created to highlight Marymount’s current students and alumni. As a class we are gaining a better understanding of how new works are created both academically and professionally. Many job opportunities for newer professional theatre artists are in new works. New works serve as a great entry level job to the professional theatre world, it builds strong relationships and gives artists a great idea of what kind of work is important to them.

Creating new works requires a different skill set than doing work that is post development. Playwrights have to grapple with questions about their plays from different points of view that they may not have considered before. Directors have to create a strong sense of the world of the play with mostly text and very little movement or design elements. Actors have to be adaptable to changes in the script and new information about their characters. Stage managers must stay organized and continually update the script changes as well as blocking changes. Dramaturgs must be able to add and change information about the play as the playwright makes changes in the script. Adaptability is a great quality for all theatre artists to have, it is a skill that functions in a particular way with new works.

On the flip side of the wonderful opportunities that new works provide, it has many inaccessible points. Oftentimes playwrights are not paid livable wages or sometimes they are not paid at all. Many times theatres require you to be an unpublished playwright, which means that people that may have had one work published can no longer access grants or workshops necessary to continue their work. There are definitely holes in the new play development system that must be fixed.

Developing new work is about creating a new story from a new point of view. It’s about asking questions such as, what stories are missing? Who is telling the story? Whose point of view hasn’t been told? Why are they telling the story? These are gaps in theatre literature that are being filled by new works.

breathe•tulum

by Monet Hurst-Mendoza

Directed by Katherine M. Carter

Lauren Foutch: Ensemble

Marlee Jones: Ensemble

Destiny Nyree McCullough: Ensemble

Kayla Rose Platania: Ensemble

Olivia Ricketts: Ensemble

Grace Webber: Ensemble

Rundown

by Penny Pun

Directed by Eugene Ma

Michael Darby: Dan

Beck Farris: Avery

Reagan Kelly: Reader of Stage Directions

Ray Plocharczyk: Ray

Karina Kaur Singh: Quinn

Emily Isabelle Taylor: Mila

Joseph Wojtkowski: Bryce

Custodians

by Shelby Solla

Directed by Mary Fleischer

Kaitlyn Dieppa: Davina

Elena Karnezis: Mel

Sedona Knitowski: Narrator

Molly Levine: Jenna

Matthew Sirju: Marcus

Connor Spaulding: Randall

Dramaturgical Piece on Rundown

by Ray Plocharczyk

Introduction

Rundown by Penny Pun is a play in which a group of college students create a workplace sitcom. In order for us to fully understand the play, we must understand two things: the evolution of the workplace sitcom and how this comedy troupe reflects present-day society.

1970s-1990s

The first mainstream workplace comedies appeared in the 1970s through the 1990s. Many new developments were created due to workplace sitcoms, the largest of these being the creation of the Mary Tyler Moore Show. This workplace sitcom was revolutionary in creating a workplace comedy that was female led, with the act of “simply existing as a 30-year-old single woman in a competitive and male-dominated workplace” being revolutionary for its time and paved the way for sitcoms such as 30 Rock, Ugly Betty, Jane the Virgin, and The Mindy Project. During this time, the general characteristics were a focus on the colorful personalities you could find in a workplace and the friends that have to help get you through a typical 9 to 5. In shows like Taxi and Cheers, the ensemble of starry-eyed blue-collar workers would “plot and strive and fail in an almost Sisyphean cycle, but they’d always have their friends to fall back on when the disappointment bore down a little too hard.” In short, the overall attitude was a “begrudging acceptance; another day, another dollar.”



The New Millennium

While the workplace sitcoms of the 20th century had a relatively positive view of the 9 to 5, by the time the new millennium rolled around, workplace sitcoms such as the British and American iterations of The Office took more of an edgy approach to workplace culture. Especially in the US Office, every single character has a dream and is unsatisfied with their current life, with examples being “manager and king of the boobs Michael Scott fancied himself a Bob Hope without his stage, sycophantic second-in-command Dwight behaved like a feudal harvester-warrior born several centuries too late, and perhaps most excruciating of all, sweet Pam had to slowly accept that her fantasies of greatness as an artist would never crystallize into reality.” In short, the new millennium gave workplace sitcoms more of an edge, bidding farewell to the “another day, another dollar” attitude of the 1970s to the attitude that “dreams die quiet, exquisitely painful deaths, but everyone believes they deserve something more.”



The Mike Schur /Modern Era

After working on the US Office, writer Mike Schur not only went on to create several successful workplace comedies, but he also revolutionized it. His work has proven that you can take the ideals presented in any sitcom and put them in any scenario. Whether it be a small-town government branch in Parks and Recreation, a New York Police Precinct in Brooklyn 99, or a simulation of hell in The Good Place, Schur has proven that you can take the philosophy of work and apply it anywhere, not just a typical office.



Why Modern Audiences Gravitate Towards the Modern Sitcom

This then leads to the question, “why are workplace comedies so popular amongst the Gen Z population? The answer to that being they tackle everyday life through an idyllic yet realistic lens. They tell stories in which “friends become lovers, Shakespearean-level dramas unfold, cartoonish hi-jinks occur, and lives are changed forever,” yet they also bring to light “the compounding factors of the economic recession, uncertain work environments for emerging high school and college graduates, and inequitable media portrayals of gender on television.” In short, workplace sitcoms take the most mundane form of modern life and transform it into a fairytale, while simultaneously keeping it firmly grounded in reality.



Conclusion

With these ideas in mind, now it is easily understandable why Avery has this drive to craft the perfect workplace sitcom, and how it may be impossible to achieve.

Dramaturgical Piece on Custodians

by Amelia Briceno and Lauren Foutch

Place

Vandergrift, Pennsylvania is a small town in PA of roughly 5,000 residents (as of the 2010 census), which can classify it as a very small town where almost everybody is bound to know each other. About 94% of the city population is white. Less than .37% of the city population is Latino or Hispanic, about 3.5% is Black, and around 2% of Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other races combined. Pittsburgh is the major city nearby, and it is less than an hour away by car. I was only able to find an Allegheny Valley School District instead of a middle school, but this district seems well-funded from the sources I have seen through Wikipedia or from the district website. However, in this particular school where it was “new in the 90s but is now dated”, it may either be a lack of resources being properly allocated or that it just needs to be updated (my high school was in a well-funded school district with high property taxes but my high school fits that same 90s description). But also, the funding is likely lacking or not allocated properly because air conditioning is only available in select rooms on the campus, which leaves most classrooms without air conditioning. It points to corruption of school board members not having priorities together, and it is interesting to see that they offer this custodial work program (which is definitely a great work opportunity), because it seems like it is a band-aid to the problem rather than having a better budget for the school district that can protect its students from heat exhaustion due to no air conditioning.

Get the story out of me. I’m just the vessel, you know what I mean? That’s why I say “the voices” talk to me. It sounds weird, but there’s a character that’s in my head that has a story they want to tell, and I’m the receiving vessel through which they can tell that story. The goal is just bringing those voices out.

Time

Custodians takes place somewhere in the mid-2010s, most likely 2014. Davina mentions being five years old when she saw the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade in 2001, and she also just graduated high school while participating in this summer’s custodian work program, so I would of course estimate that we are in 2014. This is an interesting year where President Obama is still in the White House and America has no idea what is coming for them. The economy is on an upward trend since the president stopped the recession from getting worse (the one due to the 2008 financial crisis that sent Lehman Brothers under). The biggest world event to happen this year is global panic over the Ebola epidemic. The epidemic was mostly contained in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, but two people were diagnosed and both died in the United States while at Emory Hospital in Georgia trying to get care. Also important to highlight was the rise in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement after protests came up in Ferguson, MO following the police shooting of Mike Brown as well as the decision to not indict Brown’s killer or Eric Garner’s killer from the NYPD. I see this especially as a defining moment to talk about with this play because this is a key moment that these characters have come of age with, and it will affect their perception of the world differently than someone like Randall, who is shaped by entirely different experiences since he is significantly older than these young adults. Other big events: Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS, 2014 midterm elections, the death of Robin Williams, the restoration of diplomatic relations with Cuba by the Obama administration.

History

Vandergrift, Pennsylvania was founded in 1895 as an industrial town sold to its workers. Its main source of revenue was in the steel industry. George McMurtry, president of the Apollo Iron and Steel Co., wanted to expand his operations and needed to purchase additional land in order to do so. He partnered with Frederick Law Olmstead, designer for the Chicago World’s Fair at the time, to create the “floor plan” for the town. It was named after Captain J.J. Vandergrift, who was a steel industry mogul himself. This town was one of the first of its kind in America, where a company would build a town in advance to prepare for business, and then it would turn over the control to the workers. It seems slightly different from other industrial towns like Pullman, Illinois, which ended up being the epicenter of many workers’ strikes throughout the late 19th century. This became such a pro-labor and pro-environmentalist town that it was used as a model in order to break the major strikes that first went against the steel industry. Perhaps a town like this that has always been pro-labor and has given workers a good place to live and good benefits would continue to be a popular place to live and work for many decades to come. However, what I find ironic is that the janitorial job is described by Mel as a “shitty summer gig”. Plus, it is mentioned that the gig only pays \$7.25 an hour, which is upsetting for me to hear. It is also a story of custodial workers coming together against a creepy and irresponsible boss who exploits them. I can see some correlation between the city’s history and between what these characters aspire to in the play.

References

The most prominent cultural reference, the one of music artist Lil Jon featured in Usher’s “Yeah!”, acts as a motif throughout the show. It is what brings these four students together while they work for this summer custodial program. The song was released in 2004, which shows that these characters were young children when this song came out. Not to mention that this is one of the most iconic songs to be played at parties, school dances, major sports games, you name it! It is as American as apple pie and it is a defining part of our culture. I can see how it brings these students together. Jenna said that she did not even know why she thought of Lil Jon, but it is clearly something that they will likely have an inside joke about and what they can take away from their summer experience. There is also a cultural phrase used where Jenna questions Marcus’ use of the word “tapping” used to describe having sex with someone. It is hard to pinpoint the origins of slang words like this but I can say I remember seeing memes with phrases like “I’d tap that” when I was in high school in 2014. Another word used is “slaps”, in the line that Marcus says about the Dilly bars from Dairy Queen: “Yeah, these slap.” I can recall hearing this as early as 2019, so it may be written from that later perspective of 2019 or even 2020/2021, but again, there is not a definitive date that this word was used as slang among younger generations.

Genre

Custodians falls into the comedy genre, specifically, it is a dark comedy. It contains a lot of humor and satire that is often dark or edgy while also dealing with subject that are often considered to be more serious or painful to discuss, i.e. sexual assault and more.

Language

Custodians primarily features language circa the 2015 era and the age demographics of the characters who are mostly between the ages of 17-19, with the exception of one. The characters often use slang words and phrases when speaking such as “duh,” “wanna,” and “til.” The language is specific to the town of Vandergrift, Pennsylvania with references to colleges and universities nearby, local dining establishments, stores such as “Giant Eagle,” and other locations around the school. This play also features explicit language.

Style

Since this production of Custodians is a lighting staged reading in a proscenium theatre, one could say that the style of this piece aligns with realism. Keeping in mind that this is still a dark comedy, it is important to know that this play deals with realistic themes and characters that seem normal or may be recognizable to audience members. Even though this piece takes place in the past, the plot and aspects of it are universal.

World

The world of the play is well-formed. This is mainly due to the wide variety of references, mentions of locations, as well as, off stage characters that this cast would or does interact with. Since it takes place in the U.S. in 2015, much of the world may be familiar to certain audience members. Regardless, one will learn things such as the importance of Lil Jon and Dilly Bars, how there aren't many eateries in Vandergrift, the layout of the school these characters work in, as well as how hot it gets in the summer. These are just a small selection of the many things that make the world of the play so well-formed.

Reference Images



Lil Jon



Dilly Bars



Vandergrift, Pa.

Dramaturgical Piece on breathe•tulum

by Destiny McCullough and Kayla Platania

Mendoza's relationship with Tulum!!

Playwright Monet Hurst-Mendoza is of Mexican descent and grew up heavily surrounded by the culture. She frequently visited her family in Yucatán as a child. She told us that “On these visits, my grandfather and my uncle (his brother) would plan adventurous road trips for us to experience the ancestral land we’re descended from. I remember Tulum fondly – the beach, the clear blue waters, the little fish that I could see swimming around my feet. My brother and I would build sandcastles, collect seashells, and drink water straight from coconuts my uncle chopped down with his machete. It’s one of my favorite places on earth!” Mendoza continues to hold onto her roots and uses her appreciation and passion for the culture in her work in terms of language, themes, characters, and more. The current environmental crisis of Tulum (which is on the coastline of the Yucatán Peninsula) was the driving force of inspiration for the play!

Tourism's Impact on the Industry

Tulum was not always the hot spot for tourists like it is today. Before tourism became the main source to capitalize off of, Tulum was a quiet area with much less development than it has now. Mitchell Friedman stated in his article “Unhidden Gem” that during Mexico’s “tourist era”, Tulum’s population of 92 people in 1960 quickly grew to 12,000 in the year 2000. As of the year 2020, Tulum’s population was 46,72. Now there are over 2 million tourists coming in annually. It was the government’s plan all along to make Tulum a tourist capital. It all “started in the 1970s, when the Mexican government took “[mostly empty land](#)” and purposely converted it into a politically ordained vacation destination. That was Cancún, an effort to create a mass tourism destination from scratch.” The plan was an ultimate success and now the power of social media is their biggest aid to their rich tourism economy. Celebrities and influencers capture their trips and inspire the public to seek Tulum as their next destination. While Tulum was changed completely for tourism and brought new opportunities to the land that had not been reached before, the social and environmental impact has not been too positive.

We asked Mendoza how the area has changed since her childhood in terms of environment, tourism, and demand. She shared a glimpse into her experience with us - “When I was a child, Tulum was a relatively unknown destination—a sleepy beach town and the site of the Tulum Ruins. On a recent trip to Tulum this past December, I was floored to see the massive amount of hotels, bars, and restaurants that have emerged in the last ten years. It truly has become a “hot spot” for tourists, catering to all kinds: DJs and club kids, foodies, wellness practitioners seeking rest and enlightenment—all at a premium cost and set against the backdrop of the Mayan jungle or beach. I find myself wondering, “What do our ancestors think of what this land has become?” Though Tulum looks as beautiful as it is, not many who travel there are aware of the state of the environment. The water is contaminated due to pollution caused by drugs left on shores and dumped into the waters, various products that people use and leave on the beach, and more. Caves which were once white turned black in color, coral reefs are dying, landfills are overflowing, and seaweed washes up on shore with slimy textures and repulsing odors due to the pollution. Human activity is the reason for the damage and the question is, who’s responsible? Tourists? Natives? Both? People come to stay on this tropical island for a getaway at luxury resorts offering fun nightlife activities as well as spiritual and physical wellness and healing services and rituals. Tourists are detoxing everyday while also toxifying the nature of the land. The tourism business is using beauty to their advantage to make money. While they all know how the land is suffering they cannot help but meet the demand. What also comes to play is what is seen on social media vs reality. Vice called Tulum “one of the world’s most instagrammable destinations.” Everyone wants the snapshot of the beach on their instagram story, however no one is paying attention to what is happening behind the scenes killing the wildlife and land. If this continues, who knows what is next?

Style and Structure

Because this play is still in the development process, the style or structure could possibly change at any moment. But for this reading, according to Mendoza, it is part play, part rumination. Unlike her other plays which are more traditionally structured, this project is written from multiple perspectives; both a fluid narrative and the voice of Mendoza herself. It contains both an opening ritual and closing ritual which take place at the beginning and end of a series of Vignettes or short scenes that will lead the audience through a series of different experiences through different characters - something that we also don’t see too much in traditional plays.

The World

The world of this play should feel meditative. It gives the audience a moment to reflect and take in what is happening in the world that they may not have known otherwise. It aims to give people a moment to evaluate their relationship with the environment while also taking in its natural beauty and experience just how wonderful, and spiritual it can be. In our pursuit to discover more about this play, we asked Mendoza what she would say to the people who are going to be seeing this reading. To that she said, “Buy and use reef-safe sunblock! Perfumes, sunblocks, tanning oils, and lotions come off in the water and cause significant damage to marine life. The little things you do can have a big effect on our world. We only have one planet and it’s *everyone’s* responsibility to care for it.”

Additional Resources

If you’re interested in learning more about Tulum and what you can do to help in your own way, please feel free to take a look at any of these additional articles and videos covering the topic.

Videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izKoyIfDI3w>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNFCGZ1fUo4>

Articles:

<https://magazine.tablethotels.com/en/2020/01/unhidden-gem/>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/can-science-solve-the-seaweed-problem-on-mexican-beaches>

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/05/sand-shortage-the-world-is-running-out-of-a-crucial-commodity.html>

Reference Images





As students on the projects quickly learned, a staged reading requires more than just actors and text to read. Like any normal rehearsal process, a director, voice and speech coach, and stage manager are still crucial parts to this project. Katherine M. Carter, Director of breathe tulum described what her role in New Play Development is, especially when working with her partner in crime, Monet Hurst-Mendoza.

My Job as the Director is to support the playwright. There are many voices in new play development, which means a lot of opinions to take in. As the director, part of my role is processing these different pieces of feedback and talking them through with the playwright. I love this cycle of listening and then marinating on feedback from various points of view. Sometimes the note we don't take is more important than the one that makes it into the play. The ever-evolving nature of storytelling is one of the great rewards of new play development. The best way I can put it is that working on a published play is like being given a chocolate chip cookie recipe with all the tools and ingredients. How you mix the ingredients is up to interpretation. You know that the recipe works because it made delicious cookies. New play development, on the other hand, is unknown. There is no recipe. You aren't handed the ingredients. So, if the playwright says that we're baking a cake then we're baking a cake. The fun part is playing around with what goes into the cake, how it gets made, different flavor combinations, and frostings! Each part of the development process is a taste test-what did we like from that round, and what do we need to adjust.

When Monet and I began building TULUM, we started with news articles about the eco-tourism, and branched out from there. We now have a folder full of images, articles, Instagram posts, and mini videos ranging from the ecosystem decay to high end hotel boutiques. This research was our foundation for approaching our actors in the first rehearsals. Our incredible company of six has brought their own experiences and points of view into the room, and that will be reflected in the work presented. This process has occurred organically, each rehearsal and meeting building off of the following.



Company of *breathe tulum* (taken by sophie nolan)

Voice and Speech: Brett Radke



The company was fortunate enough to have Brett Radke, Voice and Speech coach at MMC, on the project to learn how these elements differ from those of a fully produced performance. It was crucial during the process to learn the kinds of exercises could properly warm up the voice, which could be done as an entire group in addition to being catered to each individual cast. Especially due to the fact that microphones were not used for this project and everyone was required to keep masks on during their performance, actors then trained with Brett on how to pronounce and articulate the text properly in order to reach the audience. Most students were not used to the unnatural ways that the NYLA space demanded of them, so there were exercises they learned to familiarize themselves with this practice and make it feel more natural during their dialogue. This training is particularly important in the context of a stage reading so the audience can hear and react to the text, and potentially give feedback based off of what they heard.



Company of *CUSTODIANS* working with Brett Radke (taken by sophie nolan)

The Role of a Stage Manager

by Megan Bros

Stage Managers, or as I like to call them, “backstage ninjas”, are the ones running the whole show. If we think of a theatrical production team as a wheel in motion, you could consider the Stage Manager (SM) the cog of the wheel pushing the entire team forward throughout a show’s rehearsal/performance process. They are typically responsible for documenting the show in terms of props needed, all of the blocking (or, the movements of characters the actors should be following through in order for the scene to take place), calling the lighting and sound cues designers include in performances, so on and so forth. Now that we have a brief, general understanding of the work of SMs, now we focus on their role in new play development. The work shifts, especially when it’s a reading. There are much less technical elements involved, and MUCH more paperwork involved. If I could summarize the main goals of an SM into two words, it would be “anticipate” and “organize.” SMs are especially anticipating the needs of the production because things change so quickly! Characters and storylines could change in an instant, so it’s important for SMs to be prepared for whatever may arise. Because things change so quickly, organization is key. Organization in terms of frequent and clear communication, labeling new pages of a script according to their date of creation and where exactly they belong in the script, and even in keeping track of deadlines based on the production calendar becomes the driving force behind a smooth process for the development of new work.



Company of *RUNDOWN* (taken by sophie nolan)



Staged Reading Guidelines (“29-Hour Reading”)

Actors' Equity Association's **Staged Reading Guidelines** are administered by Equity as an internal union membership rule, outlining the terms under which Equity members may participate in a staged reading project, without benefit of an Equity Contract. Members are advised that because these guidelines are not a collectively-bargained Equity Agreement, Equity is not able to enforce the terms of these guidelines against a producer. **To the extent that a project does not fit within these guidelines, members of Equity are advised to discontinue participation in the project and to contact their nearest Equity office**, in order to determine whether Equity can secure an appropriate contract for the project. These guidelines do not apply to projects produced by Producing Members of the Broadway League; please contact the nearest Equity office for the applicable guidelines for Broadway League producers.

Actors' Equity Association will permit Equity Actors and Stage Managers (“Actors”) to participate in Staged Readings under the following guidelines:

- 1) The Staged Reading project must have been registered with the applicable regional Equity office.
- 2) Actors may participate for a maximum of 29 hours for rehearsals and actual Reading(s), such times to be at the Actor's convenience. Each Equity Actor must receive reimbursement of travel and other expenses. Should the combined rehearsal/Reading hours for the Reading extend beyond 29 then the production must be placed on a Staged Reading Contract, or other appropriate Equity Agreement, in order for members to continue participation.
- 3) Actors may only participate for a maximum of three (3) Readings. All Readings and rehearsals must take place within a 14-calendar-day period.
- 4) Actors may only participate in a project that does not use sets, props, wigs, make-up or costumes.
- 5) Actors may only participate in projects that are not advertised to the public or reviewed by critics.
- 6) Actors may not participate if admission is charged, if donations are solicited or if the project is offered as a “subscriber bonus.”
- 7) Actors may not participate in Readings if presentations are to solicit backers.
- 8) Actors may participate in Readings for invited audiences only. If Programs are provided, the names of all AEA members in the production are to be designated by an asterisk (*) with the indication that Actors and Stage Managers so designated are members of Equity.
- 9) Actors may only participate if no memorization by the Actor is required with book-in-hand and the project has only minimum staging with no choreography.
- 10) Actors must be reimbursed for their actual expenses as submitted by the Actor.
- 11) Non-Resident Aliens may not participate in Readings under the terms of these Guidelines.
- 12) Actors may not participate in a Reading that is televised, broadcast, or recorded in whole or in part. This restriction on members' participation includes any visual and/or sound recording, motion picture filming or videotaping.
- 13) Actors may only participate if all rehearsal and presentation spaces are wheelchair accessible, and if the producer maintains an environment that is free of harassment or discrimination.
- 14) Actors may only participate in a project if the project has not been registered with Equity as a Reading under these guidelines within the past six (6) months.

The Actor is hereby notified that participating in a Staged Reading Guidelines Presentation is not considered employment with reference to the Rehearsal Rules in either the Production Contract or the Off-Broadway Contract, both of which are entitled “Attendance at.”

If Equity determines that the Staged Reading is being used to avoid or supplant any of said Codes or Contracts, Equity may, in its sole discretion, direct that its members discontinue participation in the Reading, until the appropriate Equity agreement is in place.

The Importance of Stage Directions

by Reagan Kelly and Sedona Knitowski

Importance of Stage Directions

Stage directions (and stage direction readers :)) are crucial to the new play development process. Reading stage directions aloud helps gauge the effectiveness of dialogue and pacing of the play. So, in a staged reading, the stage directions provide the audience with information that would otherwise be evident in a full production. Other than pacing, they establish the production's overall tone and help tell the complete story that is in the playwright's mind. They often serve as a "surrogate" to the audience.

Inside the Stage Directions

At first glance, you may see stage directions as just an extra piece of a play, not something that needs to be specially prepared. The stage directions in a staged reading, in a sense, are like the backbone of the play. It provides movement and tone for the actors to go off of, and gets the audience to be fully immersed through understanding what's supposed to be happening. It's important to differentiate certain directions based on the context of the story, and overall stage directions help shape the world of the play.

Additional Resources

<https://www.breakingcharacter.com/home/2019/3/11/on-stage-directions>